

# Getting the **most** out of your ERO review

SCHOOLS



Ko te Tamaiti  
te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the  
Heart of the Matter

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## The Child – the Heart of the Matter

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# Why

## a review is important for your students and your school

An ERO education review gives a fresh perspective on a school's teaching and students' learning. It affirms the things your school is doing well and helps identify areas for improvement.

ERO's external review is designed to complement your school's own self review. Many schools find it a useful way of sharpening their own reflections on how they are doing.

Every learning organisation is a work in progress. The heart of an ERO review is professional conversation. The openness and willingness of the board, the principal and the staff to engage in dialogue with each other and with the review team is the key to getting the most out of your review.

The review offers a chance among your day-to-day activities to consider the bigger picture along with the independent viewpoint of a professional review team.

The aim of a review is to help you improve the quality of teaching and learning in your school. It confirms good practice, helps the board of trustees and principal establish priorities and creates momentum for change.

The ERO report is a tool that your school can use to grow and make progress. ●

## The review process

ERO gives school advance notice of a review

School decides if it wants to have a  
\*Friend of the School on the review

School sends review team  
documentation requested by ERO

Review coordinator and board of trustees meet and  
agree on the process for the review

Review team visits the school, talks to board,  
staff and students. Review team analyses school  
documentation and observes teaching and learning

Review team discusses interim findings with board

Unconfirmed ERO (or draft) report sent to board  
within 20 working days of the end of the review visit

Board has 15 working days to give feedback

Report finalised (and made public two weeks later)

School takes action on findings

\* See 'Choosing a Friend of the School' on page 5.

# What a review entails

**How effectively does this school's curriculum promote student learning – engagement, progress and achievement?**

This is ERO's major evaluation question. During a review, ERO uses this question to look at how well your school uses self review to improve teaching and learning; how well teaching is managed; the use made of assessment tools and data to improve students' achievement; and how your school complies with the law. Any other areas to be covered in the review will be discussed with the board and principal at the initial meetings.

Reviews are conducted by professional reviewers with many years of teaching experience in the education sector, and specific training in education evaluation.

You can be confident your review will be fair and transparent. Findings are not based on the opinions of one reviewer. Conclusions are based on evidence that is agreed as a team, and reports are always peer-reviewed and the board sees the unconfirmed report before it is published.

ERO's findings, any implications for action, and recommendations are set out in the report, which goes on ERO's website two weeks after it has been sent to the board of trustees. In the report ERO also says when it expects to schedule the next review of the school: in one, two or three years, or in 4-to-5 years. Please see the ERO website for the criteria for timing decisions ([www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)).

Reviews are carried out in accordance with the *Standards of Integrity and Conduct* issued by the State Services Commission, and ERO's *Code of Conduct*. The Chief Review Officer sets out the responsibilities of review officers under these codes in the ERO leaflet: *Expectations of Review Officers*. ●

# How

## to get the most out of your ERO review

### Be prepared

A review team has a limited amount of time in a school so it's important to use that time well.

Make sure everyone in your school is prepared and you have the relevant information ready for the team. You will want to present a clear picture of your school, its curriculum and its goals. You need to have evidence and examples ready to back up the points you are making. You don't need to prepare material especially for the review – the review team will let you know what it needs to see. Your board of trustees will meet with ERO before the review so everyone understands what is being reviewed and the sorts of questions people might be asked.

### Here are some questions to consider:

- What do you know about the achievement of students in your school?
- What are the key things that have happened in your school since the last review?
- How have you tackled issues raised in the last ERO report?
- What issues are you concerned about?
- What are you proud of?
- What are your main priorities looking ahead?

An ERO report is a public picture of your school, and is based on what you tell and show them, and what they read, hear and see.

To give ERO a comprehensive picture, as many people as possible in the school community need to provide feedback on progress and future directions. This means organising people in advance and scheduling them to meet the review team.

Read ERO's publications: *Framework for School Reviews* and *Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews*.

### **Prior discussions**

To get the best value from your review, it's important that the principal, staff and board of trustees have discussions before the ERO visit. During the visit, your school and the review team all want to achieve a focused, considered discussion, not just people's random thoughts.

The staff and board need to be clear about the direction your school has taken and wants to take. They also need to be clear about any issues that face the school. They need to be familiar with annual and strategic plans, and with self-review process and outcomes. The principal or board chair should brief everyone on the review process so they understand how critical it is to attend meetings and to make the most of the visit.

Above all, people should be encouraged to be open and to back up their views with evidence and examples. These internal discussions are not about creating false impressions; they are about facilitating the best possible sharing of information with ERO.

### **Choosing a Friend of the School**

Schools can decide to appoint a Friend to be part of the review process. A Friend helps provide a balanced and accurate picture of the school.

Choose your Friend of the School carefully. It should be someone who knows your school well but has some distance – a former board member could be good, or a previous principal or even a neighbouring board chair or principal. The Friend can't be anyone employed by the board or a board member. A Friend should be someone who can keep a confidence because they are party to discussions. The Friend also needs to be someone who gets on well with staff. The principal and board set the requirements for the Friend of the School. Their time commitment is likely to be spread over a week or so during the review visit. The Friend is the school's representative – not a designated review officer. (See ERO's *Framework for School Reviews*, *Resource D*, for more information).

## Ensuring the visit goes smoothly

There's more to a review than handing over paperwork. You want to achieve purposeful dialogue and discussion.

Clearly everyone needs to have a positive attitude towards the review process. This is a rich opportunity for a learning conversation about how your school is doing. It will add a lot of value to the challenging work in which teachers are engaged.

On a practical level, during a visit you need to:

- make sure school staff know what ERO will be focusing on
- give the ERO team ready access to what they need
- ensure the team is handily located in the school
- allow time for teachers to get to know the review team
- show flexibility – work out how to fit in the key moments of the review into your school week
- provide evidence and data to the ERO team on time
- make teachers aware that reviewers may visit their classrooms
- have a plan in place to free up staff so they can meet the review team in a timely way if required
- be open – it's not about painting a rosy picture. It's about your school getting the information and advice it needs to keep moving forward
- remember that this is an opportunity to show what you've achieved since the last review

## The visit itself

Treat the ERO team as you would any visitor. It's natural for people to be apprehensive at the beginning of a review but once your school community gets to know the review team, the dialogue will soon flow.

ERO reviews happen in a set time-frame. Discussions are necessarily brief and to the point. Don't expect extended personal discussions and don't be offended if discussions are kept to a timetable. Remember, findings are based on a wide range of evidence and do not hinge on a single conversation or event.



One reviewer doesn't write the report. It's a moderated, team-based process, designed to be as balanced and objective as possible.

So if you forget to mention something to the review team, or feel the review team has not understood something, there's a follow-up period when your school can comment on the draft (unconfirmed) report and provide further input.

### **Classroom visits**

The reviewers are likely to visit a range of classrooms to see teaching and learning in action (but will not necessarily visit every classroom). They need to get a feel for the dynamic of teaching in your school. As well, they will have a specific focus for their classroom visits.

Just teach as you would normally teach. Don't try something completely new just to impress the visitors. ERO doesn't appraise individual teachers.

Reviewers are aware that their presence in the classroom can be daunting and they take this into account. A reviewer in your classroom may take lots of notes. This is so they can back up their judgements in discussions with other members of the review team. Reviewers are unlikely to 'feed back' to you after an individual classroom visit. They are looking for trends across the school.

### **Gathering information and data**

Make sure you have the data or evidence ready for the areas ERO is to focus on. What information do you have that ERO can analyse and will find useful? Don't just provide raw information; the ERO team is not there to analyse raw data. The team is more interested in how you analyse and use that data yourself to improve learning outcomes.

What do you think your data means for your school and your students? How is the information you collect helping teaching and learning in your school?

Also be aware that the ERO team has a designated statutory authority to look at any relevant information and documents. They are empowered to access whatever information they need to complete their review.

The review team uses the evidence gathered in discussions, observation and reading to decide what would be most useful to the school in the final report.

### Taking action afterwards

The public ERO report is just one aspect of the process. Acting on its findings and following up with further discussion is where its lasting value lies.

Here are some suggestions to ensure your review becomes an important tool for change in your school:

- Use the report as a catalyst for discussion – it is a rich source of ideas for moving forward.
- Use the review to complement your own ongoing self review.
- Make sure your board and staff are familiar with the outcomes of the review and the content of the report – this empowers people to ask questions, which is healthy for a school.
- Action any non-compliance areas quickly.
- Plan for change on the bigger issues as these will take time – in some instances it may take two or three years to embed change. Plan for it, with professional development if required.
- Include your decisions in your annual plans.
- Put action items into an action plan on the board agenda so they come up each month, and you can track progress towards your goals. ●

### An ERO review:

- reaches judgements based on evidence
- discusses findings with the school so there are no surprises in the final report
- outlines the evidence for key findings
- develops priorities for action and improvement in consultation with the school
- is not released publicly until two weeks after it has been confirmed and sent to boards of trustees

# Key insights



The heart of a review is a professional conversation. A good review process is all about building an effective relationship with the board, principal and senior staff.



The more dialogue flows before the visit, the better the dialogue that follows.



An external review provides a confirmation of good practice and self review, and momentum for change.



A review highlights what's working well and what could be improved. It recognises that every learning organisation will always be a work in progress. ●

## Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa The Child – the Heart of the Matter

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For more information on reviews and to read ERO's school and national reports, go to ERO's website:

**[www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)**